

Opinion

Why domestic violence is a business issue

The term “domestic” violence inherently suggests that the problem occurs within a household, behind closed doors. So why should Atlanta’s corporate and business community care about domestic violence? Because it’s an issue that touches all of us, including in the workplace.

Nearly 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence. In 2010, there were 130 domestic violence-related homicides in Georgia, a 5 percent increase over the previous year. In fact, Georgia is ranked 10th in the nation for its rate of men killing women. Given that it is primarily a gender-based crime and more than half the workforce is comprised of women, we can not — and should not — ignore the reality that domestic violence affects the workplace. In fact, approximately 18,700 violent incidents are committed annually by an intimate partner in the workplace.

At Verizon Wireless, we have embraced a long-standing commitment to the community and to the workplace, by partnering with national and local organizations to increase awareness of domestic violence and to further prevention efforts. One way in which we live and breathe this pledge locally is through an ongoing collaboration with the Atlanta-based nonprofit Partnership Against Domestic Violence (PADV).

On April 28, 2011, we are again teaming up with PADV to present the 10th annual “When Domestic Violence Goes to Work” conference at UPS



VIEWPOINT
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World Headquarters in Sandy Springs. The training is designed to spur employers to take a preventive approach to workplace domestic violence. Human resource and security professionals, chief operating officers, employee assistance professionals, and legal counsel are among those who can benefit from this training.

Domestic violence encroaches on three key areas of business: people, productivity and profits. Sixty-four percent of domestic violence victims indicated a decline in their level of productivity, which in turn affects co-workers’ productivity. These victims face a number of employment barriers, including increased tardiness, absenteeism, and reduced productivity.

Executives at Atlanta-based companies and nationwide have come to recognize the profound need to address workplace violence. Numerous studies including Verizon Wireless’ “Father’s Day” poll of 1,020 American men found broad support for employer-based efforts to address domestic violence. Recently, a survey commissioned by PADV and conducted by The Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, with metro Atlanta business leaders revealed that 83 percent of surveyed executives believe that

domestic violence could cause significant losses of company revenue.

We know this perception of lost revenue to be true. The economic cost of domestic violence exceeds more than \$8 billion annually and can reach up to \$14,363 per person. Abused employees miss 8 million paid workdays annually — the equivalent of more than 32,000 full-time jobs. It is clear that addressing the issue from a prevention standpoint would be less costly than dealing with actual situations on a case-by-case basis.

According to the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence, an estimated 24 percent to 30 percent of abused working women lose their jobs. Unless employers develop policies and best practices that balance the safety of the employees with the needs of the company, more women will find themselves in the unemployment line.

I encourage the business community to become educated on prevention strategies and best practices to reduce your company’s liability, profit loss, and most importantly — potential loss of life. The role of employers is not to solve the employee’s situation, but to connect employees with community resources, provide a safe work environment and train employees. You can start today by committing to attend the “When Domestic Violence Goes to Work” conference on April 28.

Mango is president of the Georgia/Alabama region of Verizon Wireless.